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For first time, national WMU leaders
address convention controversy

By Karen Benson

N-WMU

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The executive board of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union issued a lengthy statement Sept. 22 directed to several groupings of Southern Baptists -- to home and foreign missionaries, to WMU members and to critics of WMU.

The statement also affirmed the denomination's traditional channels of missions giving -- the Cooperative Program, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions -- while affirming as well the "right of individuals, churches and state conventions to choose other plans for cooperative missions giving."

The statement, which was approved unanimously by state WMU presidents and state WMU executive directors, represents the first time the national WMU leadership has spoken to the controversial issues that have brought divisiveness within the Southern Baptist Convention.

In the statement, the board members and state WMU executive directors acknowledged the historic nature of their action, calling the time "one of the most crucial and pivotal points in the 102-year history of Woman's Missionary Union and the 145-year history of the Southern Baptist Convention."

"We speak as national leaders of Woman's Missionary Union," the statement says. "As such, we speak together, honoring the perspective of history, recognizing the practicality of the present, and committing to the furtherance of missions into the future."

Noticeably absent from the statement were references to WMU's status as an auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, although the leaders discussed the subject.

They agreed informally that their private understanding of the word "auxiliary" included concepts of neutrality, independence, self-support and self-governance. They also agreed informally that they have no intention of WMU becoming an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. But the leaders chose to postpone further discussion until their next meeting in January 1991.

In the adopted statement, the leaders chose to speak first to home and foreign missionaries.

"We want you to know that we will continue to love you and to support you," Dellanna O'Brien, executive director of WMU, read aloud. "We will be your staying force when you fear all others might abandon you. We affirm you individually and collectively. We are here for you now, and we will be there for you in the future."

The leaders spoke next to the 1.2 million WMU membership. They called for WMU members to pray "like you've never prayed before," to pray "diligently and daily" for missionaries, and to pray "unselfishly for yourselves, that the Lord will use you as champions for missions in your homes, in your churches, and in your communities."

Later, during a brief executive session of the board meeting, board members interrupted their discussion of routine personnel and finance matters to announce a second call to prayer. They issued an "urgent, strong call" for every Southern Baptist individually to pray for unity within the denomination. This appeal adds the WMU board to the growing list of SBC agency trustees who have issued calls for prayer for the convention.

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The national leaders also called upon the WMU membership to keep abreast of the circumstances and events in state conventions that affect missions. "Be aware, be knowledgeable, and be ready to become involved in proactive planning for the future of missions," the statement says.

To WMU critics, the national leaders said: "We regret that our silence over the years might have been construed as consent or even support of the controversy. We further regret any suspicions that WMU might be politically involved in the denominational strife."

The leaders called upon the critics to "work with us for the cause of missions."

"Throughout our history, we have taught women, girls and preschoolers to be supportive of the Cooperative Program, to be supportive of their local church, and to be supportive of their denomination," the statement says.

"We have always taught WMU women to be supportive of pastors, church staff and others in places of leadership. We have encouraged women to be positively involved in their churches. We have hoped and prayed that eventually problems in our denomination would be worked out so that we could keep our sights on missions. We are grieved and gravely concerned over the negative impact of the controversy on missions."

Historically, WMU has made a "deliberate effort to remain steadfast in our missions mandate, striving determinately and intentionally to keep missions above any denominational conflicts or controversies that have come along," the statement says.

Consequently, the leadership has remained "silent by choice during strategic junctures in denominational history."

But now, the leaders said, "individual churches are withdrawing or drastically reducing their contributions through the Cooperative Program, which provides a vital lifeline of support for home and foreign missions endeavors."

"Several state conventions are considering plans that would allow for designation of money to specific denominational agencies or to specific causes, as an alternative to the cooperative method of supporting missions, educational and evangelistic efforts."

Circumstances such as these, the statement says, are the ones that brought the WMU leaders to this "critical juncture in our history as missions leaders."

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(BP) photo and copy of full statement text mailed to state Baptist newspapers by WMU

WMU leaders struggle with questions,
discuss convention issues, scenarios By Karen Benson

N-WMU

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--National leaders of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union spent nine hours Sept. 21-22 tackling issues never dealt with before corporately, considering options and discussing scenarios "so that we'll be ready," as one state WMU president said.

Their deliberations came during a called meeting of the WMU executive board in Richmond, Va. -- where WMU was founded 102 years ago -- to specifically deal with the convention controversy and its effect on missions. The meeting represented the first time the WMU executive board has discussed the 12-year-old controversy.

The state WMU presidents and executive directors unanimously adopted a lengthy statement that included messages to home and foreign missionaries, WMU members, and WMU critics. The statement also affirmed traditional methods of missions giving, as well as alternative channels of funding missions.

What the statement did not reflect were the full range of issues and questions that the leaders struggled to answer. Their struggles came during hours of dialogue, during reports from the Southern Baptist Home and Foreign Mission Board presidents, and during small-group discussions and large-group sessions.

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The issues ranged from missions funding, to the possibility of serving a split constituency, to the possibility of becoming a missionary-sending agency, to the potential of having to align with one convention or another should a new convention be formed.

Other than the statement, the leaders did not reach consensus on all the issues discussed. According to one of the board members, "We have many questions, and few answers."

The leaders were assigned to groups of about eight leaders each, with a fairly equal mix of state presidents and state executive directors, to discuss three questions and to consider four scenarios.

Each group was asked to discuss the following:

-- "Identify the unchangeable, bedrock principles -- the non-negotiables of Woman's Missionary Union, SBC."

-- "There have been a number of alternative funding programs emerging. How, if at all, does this affect our support and promotion of the Cooperative Program? Do we also endorse other giving alternatives that benefit home and foreign missions?"

-- "How do we deal with a possible duality required of us in light of the formation of various groupings? How can we continue to be inclusive in relating to all SBC churches and state leadership? What problems, if any, do you anticipate in this matter?"

In a report time after the small-group discussions on these questions, the leaders spent considerable time discussing the "bedrock principles" and the missions funding questions. Their discussions of the third question centered on the recognition that "to deal with reality, we have to deal with duality" in the denomination, as one state leader said.

The groups also were given four scenarios to discuss:

-- "If WMU were requested to consider providing a channel for missions giving, what should our response be? Discuss ramifications of such an action, both from the standpoint of implementation and benefit/reactions."

-- "If a new sending agency is formed (by the fellowship, for example), does WMU support or ignore it?" (The fellowship refers to a meeting in Atlanta last month of moderates who feel disenfranchised from the convention by the current leadership.)

-- "If a new convention is formed, how would WMU determine its position and ultimate alignment?"

-- "If WMU is requested to send missionaries, home and foreign, what are the pros and cons? How should such a decision be made?"

Although the leaders discussed the scenarios in small groups, time did not allow for reports on the groups' deliberations in the large-group session.

The leaders agreed to continue their deliberations on these issues at the next meeting of the WMU executive board, Jan. 5-11, 1991, in Birmingham, Ala., at the national headquarters.

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SBC mission board leaders
disagree over state of CP

By Susan Todd

N. WMU

Baptist Press
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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Even though Southern Baptist mission board leaders agreed on the history of the Cooperative Program, they did not agree on the current state of the funding program in their reports to Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union leaders Sept. 21.

The two missions leaders -- Keith Parks, president of Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, and Larry Lewis, president of Southern Baptist Home Mission Board -- spoke during a called meeting of the WMU executive board in Richmond, Va.

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Both leaders agreed that the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' 65-year-old unified plan of giving, traditionally has been an effective means of funding missions. Gifts from the Cooperative Program made up 38.5 percent of the 1990 FMB budget and 35 percent of the 1990 HMB budget.

"Certainly I concur that our Cooperative Program is the preferable plan," said Parks. "But the question I'm asking is, 'Will it remain intact?' Never in my experience has that question been as frequently asked and frequently discussed than in the last few months."

Parks questioned whether the Cooperative Program could be maintained as a dependable source of funding in its present state.

"We are in a desperate situation if those who are promoting the Cooperative Program most are supporting it the least," Parks said.

"I'm hearing things such as, 'If all Southern Baptists are to be equally supportive of our plan, as we have in the past, then there should be a give and take in the control of our convention.'

"There's enough perception of exclusion that until that exclusion is moderated and decreased, we're really fighting a struggle to say 'You really ought to support our cooperative plan of giving.'" Parks said. "I believe thoroughly and simply that a cooperative way is the best way. But what are the possible options if our present is not possible to sustain?"

Parks suggested that the status quo could not be maintained simply by encouraging people to do so.

But Lewis was adamant in his appeal to the national WMU leaders for their endorsement of the Cooperative Program as the sole channel of missions funding for Southern Baptists.

Referring to action taken by HMB trustees regarding the Cooperative Program, Lewis said, "We do affirm the Cooperative Program ... as the preferred method of missions funding. And we oppose efforts to circumvent the Cooperative Program."

However, Lewis said, even though the HMB opposes alternate funding plans, they do acknowledge the right of any state convention, church or individual to support missions in any way they choose and will accept funds from those sources.

But, Lewis added, "We're not talking about THE right, but what IS right."

When asked if the FMB will accept money from alternate funding sources, Parks replied, "You've got to be kidding! We've never checked the orthodoxy of anyone wanting to send money to the FMB."

But Lewis urged caution, describing the impact of indefinite funding sources through alternate plans as "horrendous."

"When we begin to tip our hat toward any of these plans, we're opening Pandora's box, and it may well unravel the Southern Baptist Convention as we've known it," Lewis said. "We certainly don't need another issue to drive us further apart."

Both men reported that their budgeting and program planning processes are relatively buffered through 1991 from any impact from alternate funding or negative designations.

"We do not, at this point, anticipate significant negative impact on the 1991 budget," Parks said. "Beyond that, our crystal ball gets as murky as the one the Home Mission Board is using."

Baylor University's trustees
change school's charter

By Toby Druin

N. CO
Baylor

WACO, Texas (BP)--Moving to free the school from the perceived threat of a conservative takeover, Baylor University's trustees voted Sept. 21 to change its charter to put distance between the university and control by the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

By a vote of 30 to 7 with one abstention, according to trustee Chairman W. Winfred Moore, the trustees moved to change the university charter to replace the current 48-member board of trustees with a 24-member board of regents who will have "sole governance" of the institution.

The charter change was filed with the Texas secretary of state and is effective immediately, said Moore.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas heretofore has elected trustees of the university. Under the new arrangement, if it stands, the convention still will elect 48 trustees, but their responsibility will be only to elect one-fourth of the regents -- eight of whom will be chosen annually -- and to serve as "liaisons" between the convention and the university and help in fund raising.

Three-fourths of the board of regents would be elected by the regents themselves. They would have to be Baptists but only six of them would be required to be Texas Baptists.

Implementing the switch immediately, the trustees elected nine of their number to serve as regents for three-year terms and seven new regents. All are Texas Baptists, including two pastors, Roger McDonald of First Baptist Church of Garland and Max Brown of First Baptist Church of Galveston. Two others who have been prominent in denominational affairs recently also were elected. They are W. Dewey Presley of Dallas, former chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee; and John Baugh of Houston, who has been active in Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention.

The charter change by the trustees without approval of the Baptist General Convention of Texas is in violation of the convention constitution.

Article VIII, Section 4 of the constitution states that any changes or amendments to an institution charter be submitted to the convention for approval at the annual meeting and any such changes require the prior approval of the executive board in the meeting just prior to the annual meeting.

To follow that provision, the Baylor trustees would have had to apprise the executive board at its Sept. 11 meeting of the proposed change. No notice was given.

Mike Bishop, assistant to Baylor President Herbert H. Reynolds, said that under Texas law and provisions of Baylor's charter, which was granted by the Republic of Texas and pre-dates the BGCT charter, the university trustees have exclusive right to amend the charter.

No notice was given to the BGCT that the change was to be considered, although Bishop said it had been under study for two years.

Texas Baptist Executive Director William M. Pinson Jr., was not told about the proposed change and in fact learned of it first when called for comment by the Baptist Standard, newsjournal of the Texas convention.

Pinson declined comment until he has time to confer with Reynolds and Moore.

"It would be premature for me to elaborate on the situation," before consulting with them, he said. "I do hope that Baylor will maintain its historic relationship with the Baptist General Convention of Texas."

Established in 1845, Baylor is the oldest and largest of the eight universities affiliated with the Texas convention. It has a record enrollment of 12,019 students this fall and is scheduled to receive a \$6,048,219 allocation from state convention funds in the 1991 budget to be considered at the state convention in Houston, Nov. 13-14.

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Both Reynolds and Moore said the university intends to maintain its "close affiliation with Texas Baptists." Both also cited the threat of a conservative takeover of the university board of trustees such as has happened to Southern Baptist seminaries as having prompted the action.

The university has been mentioned frequently, especially by Reynolds, as a takeover target of conservatives.

"I think taking Baylor out of the eye of the political storm, not only in Texas but also in the SBC, will make it much easier for us to get on with our missions involvement in this state and other places," Moore told the Baptist Standard.

"Baylor will not be there to be shot at or defended. We don't have to expend the energy or defend a takeover of Baylor University, and I hope personally that it means -- and Dr. Reynolds has expressed the same view -- that we can get on to winning this state and world to Jesus Christ."

In a news release regarding the action, Reynolds said, "This is an historic and courageous initiative by the board of trustees. This action will maintain Baylor's academic excellence and continue its worldwide Christian emphasis.

"Friends, students and alumni of Baylor can be assured that Baylor will remain true to its historic mission of being the world's finest Christian university and, at the same time, be free from an attempted takeover by any special interest group."

"Baylor intends to continue its close affiliation with Texas Baptists," Reynolds added. "By this trustee action, a divisive issue has been settled in the best interests of all concerned, permitting Texas Baptists and Baylor to pursue our Christian ministries in harmony and cooperation. At the university, this action will secure a stable climate in which academic excellence will flourish and in which donors can have confidence that their gifts will have lasting value."

Moore defended the nature of the action, accomplished without going through the prescribed convention notification process.

"It was strictly a trustee matter," he said, "a matter for trustees to look at. We didn't want to create a lot of unnecessary uneasiness by publicizing it."